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ABSTRACT

This study attempts to discover whether personal value structures are present at the personality level of student interaction (1) when there are no specific issues confronting the student, or (2) when issues are present and interaction results in linkage of the student value structure with a particular issue. Based on the results of a differential value profile, 47 students were placed in 11 discussion groups to discuss one of the following six value topics: aesthetic, material, power, intellectual, humanitarian, and religious. The members of each group had a similar hierarchy of values. In phase one, five groups chose topics corresponding to their value hierarchy. The aesthetics were the only value groups not to choose a corresponding topic. Only three of the groups chose discussion leaders whose value hierarchy was the highest for the group. In phase two, the groups were reorganized with a "plant" in each group. Nine of the groups chose the "plant" as discussion leader. The study thus indicates that (1) personal value structures become a factor in student behavior only when aligned with an issue and when value conflicts arise between individuals and the issue; and (2) when an opposing issue is presented to a group, the person whose value hierarchy was congruent to the issue is perceived by the group as best able to cope with the issue. It is recommended that counselors working with students experiencing value conflicts try to identify the underlying issues. (CA)

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STUDENT VALUE STRUCTURES:
KEY TO INTERPERSONAL INTERACTION
IN THE COLLEGE COMMUNITY

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STUDENT VALUE STRUCTURES: KEY TO INTERPERSONAL
INTERACTION IN THE COLLEGE COMMUNITY

In recent years there has been considerable research on the relationship between students' personal values and the interaction of these values in the college community.* Of particular importance are the conflicts which result from the confrontations between incongruent value systems.

A review of the literature indicates these value relationships. Dressel (1966) suggested students who were not explicit about their values could cause interference with the education of others and be in conflict with their environment. Pierce (1955) indicated disagreement can exist among individuals when people with diverse values attempt decision making risks. Klinger (1962) applies these value relationships as aids to the guidance counselors who must understand the "moral codes" of their students.

*See for example: E.G. Williamson, "Value Options and the Counseling Relationship," The Personnel and Guidance Journal, Vol. XLIV, No. 6 (Feb., 1966), p. 618; William F. Brazziel, "Needs, Values, and Academic Achievement," Improving College and University Teaching, (Summer, 1964), pp. 159-163; Sister Maureen McCormack, Study of Existing Student Value Patterns for Selected Catholic College Women. Office of Education (DHEW) Washington, D.C., Bureau of Research, November, 1968, p.137; Lois E. Olive, "Relationships of Values and Occupational Role Perceptions for Freshmen and Senior Students in a College of Engineering," Journal of Counseling Psychology, 1969, 16 (March) pp. 114-120; Edith Weisskopf-Joelson, et al., "Relative Emphasis on Nine Values by a Group of College Students," Psychological Reports, 24 (February, 1969) pp.299-310; Daniel A. Michalak, "The Clarification of Values," Improving College and University Teaching XVII (Spring, 1970), p.100. Robert J. Dollar, "Interpersonal Values and College Persistence," The Journal of College Student Personnel, Vol. II (May, 1970) pp. 200-202; L.B. Bourque and K.W. Black, "Values and Transcendental Experiences," Social Forces 47 (September), pp. 34-38; James R. Sherman, "Student Perception of Value Change," National Catholic Guidance Conference Journal 12 (Summer, 1968) pp. 246-252; William Zehv, "Student Values at Colorado State College," College Student Survey 2 (Fall, 1968) p.27; John R. Bittner, "Student Value Profiles of State and Church-related Colleges," College Student Survey, 2 (Spring, 1968), pp. 1-4.

Research, however, has failed to pinpoint exactly where personal value structures appear as a determining factor of student behavior. Are personal value structures present at the "personality" level of student interaction, removed from the presence of any specific issues confronting the student? Or, are value structures more apt to be present when "issues" are present and when interaction results in the linkage of the students' value structures and the particular "issue?" This study attempted to answer the above questions.

Values Defined

Theoretical definitions of value--Rokeach (1968) defines values in the following way,

Values transcend specific objects and specific situations; values have to do with modes of conduct and end-states of existence. More formally, to say that a person 'has a value' is to say that he has an enduring belief that a particular mode of conduct or that a particular end-state of existence is personally and socially preferable to alternative modes of conduct or end-states of existence.

And Thomas, author of the Differential Value Profile, (which was used to identify "value structures" in this study) defines values as "a normative conceptual standard of the desirable that predispositionally influences of behavior."

Operational definition of values--The Differential Value Profile, noted above was used to identify student "value structures." Scaled areas of the DVP include aesthetic, material, power, intellectual, humanitarian, and religious values. Briefly, these refer to the following;

1. Aesthetic--The person possessing a significant amount of this value looks at his environment and reacts to it according to its form, symmetry, beauty, and harmony...
2. Material--The man with a high material value looks at his environment in the light of the 'dollar sign'; economic worth is primary. This type is thoroughly practical and will tend to judge an event or object by its tangible benefits...

3. Power--The person with the power value looks at everything as a means of giving him power and authority. He has an urge for leadership and domination of others...
4. Intellectual--The person with a degree of this value will place emphasis on the 'cognitive' aspects of behavior. He will enjoy the theoretical pursuits. He will seek to observe and to reason...
5. Humanitarian--The highest value for this type is love of people; whether of one or many, whether conjugal, filial, friendly, or philanthropic. The Humanitarian man prizes other persons as ends, and is therefore himself kind, sympathetic, and unselfish...
6. Religious--The highest value of the religious man is that of commitment to a Higher Purpose. He is mystical, and seeks to comprehend the cosmos as a whole, to relate himself to its embracing totality...

WHY VALUES?

Values--criteria for evaluation--The first reason for the examination of student "Value structures" as a determinant of student behavior in interpersonal communication situations is that theoretical descriptions of values suggest that they are standards or criteria by which people evaluate life experiences. As Rokeach (1968) pointed out,

...a value is a standard or criteria that serves a number of important purposes in our daily lives; it is a standard that tells us how to act or what to want; it is a standard that tells us what attitudes we should hold; it is a standard we employ to justify behavior, to morally judge, and to compare ourselves with others,

Steele (1962) also indicated how values may serve as criteria for evaluation of life experiences. According to Steele,

...a system of value orientations contains those generalizations about what is true or real, and about what is good or desirable, which are acceptable by a social group in answer to the questions: What is the ideal type of man? What is the appropriate relationship between men? What is man's relationship to nature? and What is the relationship of man to time?

When values serve as a standard for evaluation of life experiences, chances are those same values may effect a student's interpersonal communication behavior in the college community; especially when interpersonal interaction takes place between people with completely different "value structures."

Values--behavioral determinants--Values appear to be related to the decision making process. Whait (1963) identifies the relationship between values and behavior. He states,

Whenever we talk about values and valuing, we are confronted-in actuality, in principle, or in retrospect with persons engaged in processes of selection or choice with respect to objects. We employ the terminology of values as a conceptual handle for discerning and dealing with regularities in this behavior. This selective behavior may be instrumental to attaining some further object or state of affairs beyond that to which it is immediately oriented, or it may be consummatory, an end-term in the behavioral sequence. Or the behavior under inspection may rather be talk about such encounters.

And Thomas also notes that values "influence individuals in choosing among personally perceived alternatives of behavior."

Values--significant in communication--Ruesch and Bateson (1951) have identified a key reason why values should be examined in connection with student communication behavior. According to these authors,

...values are therefore, so to speak, simply preferred channels of communication or relatedness. Information about values people hold enables us to interpret their messages and to influence their behavior.

Minnick (1957); and Redding and Steele (1962) have identified lists of values of contemporary Americans which serve any speaker in his attempt to select the right motive appeals for a given audience. These lists of values also may prevent the speaker from alienating members of an audience by threatening their values.

Carlton (1954) found that a listener's personal values may influence his ability to comprehend monosyllabic and dysyllabic words. He concluded that word intelligibility was greater when listeners heard words of value connotation in agreement with their personal values than when they heard words of differing value connotation.

If values have an affect upon intelligibility, surely there is reason to examine how they influence interpersonal communication behavior in a small group situation.

METHOD

Based on the results of the Differential Value Profile (DVP) forty-seven students were placed in eleven discussion groups for the purpose of discussing one of six "value oriented" (aesthetic, humanitarian, intellectual, material, power, and religious) discussion topics (issues). Each group was informed the discussions were to be "open-ended" and concentrated on the exchange of information rather than the attainment of a particular goal or the solution to a problem.

The discussion topics were established by five communication experts who constructed a discussion topic concerning each specific value structure but not overlapping with other value structures. Discussion questions and value areas were then placed in two separate lists and randomly mixed. Ten additional persons who had studied value structure at some point in their academic careers were asked to match each discussion question with the appropriate value area. Matchings were correct in 100 per cent of the cases.

The discussion topics tested for validity and reliability were as follows:

AESTHETIC: The perpetuation of culture and the fine arts is an important part of our national heritage.

HUMANITARIAN: A lack of true compassion and empathy for fellow man is evident in contemporary life.

INTELLECTUAL: Intellectual development and the importance of higher education are key factors in a progressive society.

MATERIAL: Monetary gain and proper financial management are necessary to achieve success.

POWER: To be considered a success a person should strive to attain leadership positions in his chosen profession.

RELIGIOUS: An increased awareness of a higher spiritual being is necessary for the total fulfillment of life.

Phase one: Eleven groups of discussion participants were established with the number of participants in each group ranging between 3 and 6 members per group and all members of each group possessing the same value hierarchy. Two groups possessed "humanitarian" value hierarchy, two groups possessed an "aesthetic" value hierarchy, two groups possessed an "intellectual" value hierarchy, two groups possessed a "religious" value hierarchy, two groups possessed a "material" value hierarchy, and one group possessed a "power" value hierarchy. Each group was permitted five minutes to choose a discussion topic from one of the six alternatives, then each group was asked to choose a discussion leader. The choosing of a discussion leader was to determine if the chosen leader would be an individual possessing one of the highest value hierarchies among members of the group.

Phase two: The second part of the study was an effort to determine if a discussion group would tend to choose as a leader a person possessing a value hierarchy in the area of the discussion topic when all other members of the discussion group possessed opposing values to that of the discussion topic. In the second part of the study, the same eleven discussion groups were formed except in each case a topic was assigned which was different than the general value hierarchy of the group. In each group one participant

was a "confederate" possessing a strong value structure in the same value area as the assigned topic. Participants after ten minutes of discussion were asked to choose a leader and at the conclusion of the 25 minute discussion were asked to vote for the person they "felt contributed most to the discussion."

In all cases, students were unaware they were being grouped according to value structure and unaware during the second part of the experiment that an individual had been "transplanted" purposely into the group. Since the assignment of a particular person to a specific group resulted in the addition and subtraction of one member of the group the students did not visibly show any concern when they were told the groups were being shifted to permit different members of the class to participate in discussion with a variety of their classmates. Neither did the students receive any instruction in values structure. When first taking the DVP they were told it would apply to the persuasion section of the course late in the semester. A class period noted in the syllabus as a day scheduled for "impromptu speaking" was used to administer the DVP.

FINDINGS

Phase one: The eleven groupings of students based on their personal value hierarchies produced five groups (45.4 per cent) which chose the value topic for discussion which corresponded to the personal value hierarchy of the group.

Those choosing corresponding topics included groups with humanitarian values, intellectual, religious, material, and power values. In neither case did the aesthetic value group choose the aesthetic value discussion topic. When the eleven groups were asked to choose discussion leaders, only three groups (27.2 per cent) chose leaders whose value hierarchy was the highest of that particular group.

Phase two: When a "confederate" was planted as a discussion participant whose value hierarchy was the same as the assigned topic in nine of the eleven groups (81.8 per cent) chose the "confederate" whose value structure corresponded to that of the assigned topic.

Implications

This study indicates that personal value structures become a factor in student behavior only when it is aligned with an issue and when "value conflicts" arise between individuals and the issue. Only when an opposing issue (discussion topic) was presented to a group did it make a difference as to who was perceived by members of the group as best being able to cope with the issue. In this study, it was the person whose value hierarchy was congruent to the issue.

Counselors confronted with students who seemingly are experiencing value conflicts with other students or the educational community, would do well to look beyond the personality factors involved and try to identify the issue present. It has long been known that changing values, is not only a difficult process but must occur over a length of time greater than the four year college experience. Perhaps by attempting to go beyond the personality level of a student to discover the actual issue which is in conflict with the students value structure, the issue can be changed, the student can be removed from its influence, or the issue can be attacked from within the value hierarchy of the student.

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